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Emanuel's Lutheran Church, Bellevue, PA  
November 1, 2009 • All Saints Day  
Revelation 21:1-6a

The book of *Revelation* is often misunderstood. We read it and it sounds bizarre. Everything is symbolic—visions and numbers, beasts and battles. The book is part of the apocalyptic literature of the Bible, like the book of *Daniel*. It does not predict events that will occur literally. Instead, its symbols and narratives speak truth to every age. *Revelation* describes an understanding of who God is, in our present era. It holds up a vision of what God has begun doing among us, in the person of Jesus Christ. It points toward the Spirit's plans for our world.

Our passage today tells us very important things about who God is, and about our relationship. We may think of God as high in heaven, watching us from afar. But *Revelation* sets a different vision of how God relates to us.

‘See, the home of God is among mortals.  
He will dwell with them;  
they will be his peoples,  
and God himself will be with them.’(Rev 21:3)

God's home is right here, with us. This is why God established a covenant with the people of Israel. This is why the Word of God came to us in Jesus Christ. This is why the Spirit claims us as God's people in the waters of baptism. We are God's own, beloved children. The description of how God relates to us is very intimate.

He is very close at hand. And he cares for us with love and empathy. For “[God] will wipe every tear from their eyes.” *(Rev 21:4)* God is bound up with humanity so much that he knows. For Jesus has been human. He has known sadness and pain and mourning. He has cried after the death of his friend, Lazarus. *(Jn 11:35)* He has suffered rejection from friends and physical pain. Jesus has known the worst of our human lives. and much more.

Later in our lesson, the “one who was seated on the throne” speaks. And the words are meant for us now. “See, I am making all things new.” *(Rev 21:5)* Our God who knows us so intimately. Who chooses to dwell with us like family. Who joins us in our pain and sorrows. This same God is renewing our lives, and all of creation.

This is the good news of the gospel summed up! God showers love on our broken world. God brings forgiveness and reconciliation to communities in strife. Healing to those whose bodies or hearts are sick. Reconciliation to broken relationships. New life to places of mourning and death. I’m sure we could have a grand discussion of ways that we have seen God working in our world. The longer we live, the more stories that we have of such moments. Blessings that humans could never have arranged. I have friends who stopped calling these times

coincidences. Instead they are God-incidents. They are part of God working new creation in our lives.

God begins this process of new creation in our lives at the moment of our baptisms. Today we witness the baptism of Evan James Stillwagon. He was born in April, but we see him born again today. The Spirit of God will pour upon him. Blessing him with God's presence and love. Gathering him into the body of Christ. In the process, Evan's sin dies with Christ in the waters of chaos. He is raised up to live a new life. Sanctifying him—making him holy—as we have all been made holy in baptism. Evan will be made one of us—a saint in Christ's body.

With the people of God, he will learn Christian scripture and beliefs. He will learn to worship and pray. He will give thanks to God in our community, and at the Eucharistic table. He will give thanks at all times, in joy or sorrow. Like us, Evan will bear Christ's good news to the world, in word and deed. Another sinner turning into a saint. He will be embraced in the Spirit's love. and will share God's love with the world. He will live as God's new creation, here and now.

Today we commit to journey with Evan in faith in all these ways. We profess our faith today, and affirm all our baptisms. Together we celebrate that God has brought us into the family as God's beloved. And together we welcome Evan "into

the body of Christ and into the mission that we share.” (ELW, 231) One of Evan’s first ministries among us is to remind us why we are here.

Emanuel’s Evangelical Lutheran Church exists to “bear Christ’s creative and redeeming word to the world.” (ELW, 231) We are here to teach and preach, heal and serve, all in the name of Jesus Christ.

Our ministries of teaching, preaching, serving and healing are essential to bring about God’s will for the world. Through Christ, we are a means of God’s grace to the world. The ELCA’s slogan right now is “God’s work. Our hands.” It points us toward how we are tools for God’s good purposes.

For there are people who have not yet met the gospel. Neighbors who long for spiritual friendships in a community of faith. Fellow-Christians who do not have a church home—who want to be fed by Christ’s word and sacraments. Through Evan’s baptism, God calls us back to our baptismal mission as a congregation. This is God’s answer to many of our questions. Why have some of Emanuel’s members disappeared? How will we pay the bills in a few years? How can we welcome more people into our congregation?

God hears our concerns and feels our pain. God loves us more than we can imagine. And calls us to return to who we are. We are God’s hands, serving the

world around us. We are ambassadors of Christ's gospel. Teaching. Bearing one another's burdens. Giving thanks to God at all times.

We are God's beloved saints, washed and reborn. Let the new creation continue!